

# Hyōhaku

Written by Fuyumi Ono

Translated by [o6asan](#)

[Mt.Kankyū](#), [En](#). The top of the mountain pierces the Sea of Clouds. It is literally an isolated island far off in the sea, where [Gen'ei-kyū](#) spreads in the gray of dawn, the palace is very isolated. The moon still remains in the sky, and the calm sea surface is like a vast sheet of brocade to which the wavelet was interwoven with silver threads.

There is time before daybreak. However, a block of [Gen'ei-kyū](#), the building that is called [Jinjū-den](#), already overflows with lower officials. Especially, the main bedroom is surrounded by a thick wall of women and men of the court. Though all of them don't particularly do anything, they keep close watch on around and feel highly tense. The lower officials pause near the doorway and the windows seem as if holding their own breath.

In the silence, not hearing even a cough, time flows slowly. Then, the morning sun shines, and the bell sounds loud as if waiting for it.

The lower officials here and there begin to move, startled. They open the door, open the windows, and occupy the place after letting the sunlight in. The court ladies who were waiting in a corner of the bedroom open the door of a luxurious bed, and rush into it.

“[Taiho](#)! Please awake, my lord!”

When one of the court ladies raises her voice, it seems the sign for someone who wriggles in the curtains which envelope the bed itself. As two court ladies from right and left pull and open the curtain, a shadow slips into the bedding like escaping, it has been recognized. A pail is brought in while doing so, clothes of a rack are replaced, and tools for the morning dress are prepared on the table. There is no room around the bed because the court ladies move all together.

“It is the time to get up, my lord.

“Please get up, my lord.”

One of the court ladies peels off the covers and the other raises the master who jumps on the bed. The third one is taking his pajamas off, at the same time the fourth is letting out his official clothes and dressing him in it.

“Stop! I’m up. Already up!”

[Rokuta](#) throws off those court ladies’ hands, running feverishly into a far corner of the bed while clinging to his pillow. The court ladies who call for his getting up and stand in a row thickly by the side of the bed are literally a wall. Moreover, the wall seems about to collapse and to surge on the bed at any moment.

“[Taiho](#)! Please get up, my lord.”

“Changing clothes, my lord.”

“Setting hair, my lord.”

“Wait, I’m getting up now! Everyone, just calm down. —Right?”

The Prime Minister of the country is running around to escape by sheltering behind his pillow, above all, it might need that he himself settles down.

“Well, [Taiho](#), step on it, my lord!”

“It is the time, now, my lord.”

“I get up. Now, at once.”

“Hurry up, my lord. —[Taiho](#).”

[Rokuta](#) shouts holding his pillow.

“And you all request me to get out of my bed and to go to the conference immediately. I will, I will!”

## 2

A cool morning sun shines into the wide courtyard of the inner palace. The sky above is clear blue, the sound of the waves of the Sea of Clouds, and the wind that slightly contains a fresh saltiness blows.

[Rokuta](#) goes over to the outer palace while reproachfully seeing the scenery that becomes really autumn-like. Entering the outer palace he is already very tired in spite of only being early morning, and he meets his master who looks as tired as him. That is the Ruler of [En](#), [Ruler En](#), [Shōryū](#).

“Hey...”

“We run into each other again this morning.”

[Shōryū](#) who is bored to death replies, he is dignified only in appearance, but there is not any of the dignity of the Ruler even on his voice or his face.

“Today for sure I keenly considered not meeting you.”

[Rokuta](#) says and distances himself from his attendants casually. He lowers his voice standing next to [Shōryū](#).

“...Hey, can’t you do something about this fuss?”

“Don’t look at me.”

The Ruler’s voice is low and deeply-troubled.

“You are the greatest man in this country, aren’t you? Do something by Imperial

order.”

“Don’t you know who the greatest in this country is?”

“...[Itan](#)”

[Rokuta](#) mutters, and the master and his man sigh all together.

“It is because you did unnecessary things.”

The [Ruler En](#), [Shōryū](#), ascended the throne and more than 100 years passed. The domestic affairs got on the right track, the name of the era was changed at the [Taigen](#) and 4 years passed, and [Shōryū](#) suggested the senior official’s reshuffle.

“You did agree, too.”

For years, if the same official seizes the same duty, politics will be biased by all means. Even if a person in question isn’t planning to do, politics itself tends to have a habit which is accumulated for a long time, it cannot be avoided. The bias must be suppressed and the rigidity must be excluded, at the same time official’s view must be expanded, for this, [Shōryū](#) asserted they needed official’s reshuffle regularly with or without them deserving it. And then he had a point there certainly.

“...Yeah, you’re right. But, why is [Itan](#) of all others [Taisai](#)?”

“We had no other choice. He himself said he wanted it by all means.”

[Shōryū](#) recommended [Itan](#) for [Chōsai](#), the head of [Rikukan](#). However, [Itan](#) himself insisted to be appointed [Taisai](#) and not wanting any other posts. Saying it was a threat rather than a wish might be more accurate to the fact, because if

not he said he would return [Senseki](#) and retire.

“You also said to let him have his own way.”

“I never thought he had such big plans...”

[Taisai](#), the head of [Tenkan](#), rules everything regarding the court. The domestic affairs were given priority anyway, so they had no time to care about things inside the palace. As both humans and buildings in the court remained being ruined because of the longtime abandonment, it seemed that to improve the moral fiber of the court was also necessary. —And at first [Itan](#) decided to devote himself to make the Ruler and the [Saiho](#) have better attitudes.

“Why am I woken up at the crack of dawn? Why should I copy The Classic of History from early morning and look over the drafts and the reports to the Ruler?”

“Don’t ask me.”

“Recently, I wake up before dawn. To wait timidly for the bell ring already or about to ring are too terrible for my heart.”

“Definitely. Besides, if I get up before the time, I am pushed back to the bed by the attendant running up.”

“Absolutely not. I, seem to become [Shitsudō](#)...”

When [Rokuta](#) sighs, they arrive at the entrance of the conference room

“I hear an unlucky talk from early morning.”

Three men wait in front of the great door. The person who says happily at the center of them is [Itan](#), the head of [Tenkan](#), who is much talked about.

“I would have to take issue with [Shitsudō](#).”

“This is major if it is true, we must request [Shujō](#) reforms his conduct.”

Having said from right and left of [Itan](#) are [Seishō](#) who is the head of [Kakan Daishiba](#), and [Shukō](#) who is the head of [Shunkan Daisōhaku](#). [Tenkan](#) rules everything of the court, [Kakan](#) takes charge of their personal protection, and [Shunkan](#) rules ceremonials and etiquette. When these three sections cooperate, [Rokuta](#) and [Shōryū](#) never can deal with them. Because it is impossible not to have people of these three sections around them at any time.

[Shōryū](#) murmurs.

“I think they were conspiring.”

[Rokuta](#) nods sickly.

“I thought it was strange that [Seishō](#) wanted to be [Shiba](#).....”

To begin with [Seishō](#) was a general who kept [Left Division](#) of [Ruler's Army](#). [Seishō](#) is not a civil servant but originally a military officer even though he belongs to [Kakan](#) similarly. [Itan](#) previously managed the land, the people, and the treasury as the head of [Chikan Daishito](#). As he likes to command the site and to be ardent to yield practical benefit, [Tenkan](#) that has no practical gain unfits his personality at all.

“We relaxed our guard because [Shukō](#)'s desiring to be [Shunkan](#) was so suitable.”



“I agree. —We, might actually...”

When [Rokuta](#) sighs, [Shōryū](#) nods looking reproachful.

“...We were trapped by these guys.”

“Very good. Their reform continues well.”

[Itan](#), the mastermind of this situation, blows his horn with his face beaming with smiles.

The bright moonlight before the rainy season streams down on the garden of [Shukō](#)’s house. A side of the garden faces the Sea of Clouds, and the waves surge to the rocky stretch which could be seen nearby at the other side of the garden trees. A salty night breeze, lapping of waves, and the clear moonlight washes the surface of a ceramic table.

“At the beginning, they slipped through our fingers in one way or another. But now, we have had their perfect attendance for two months.”

Setting three glasses on the table, [Shukō](#) gives a wry little smile.

“I think, even if they are [Shujō](#) and [Taiho](#), they cannot move at all because we all watch their every movement carefully.”

“From early morning till night I will severely train them who have no will to act on their own. So, being completely exhausted, they might want to sleep than to stay out late.”

“...can you go that far?”

“I don’t care what you say”, [Itan](#) says so happily.

“The domestic affairs settled down, so I overlooked some of their arbitrary actions. Then they got carried away and disappeared for two or three months. It’s O.K. that they looked around [En](#), but they left the country and knocked

around here and there, at last they got into trouble in other countries. So, they have themselves to blame for this situation.”

“You’re right”, it is [Seishō](#) that nods. ‘As the two disappeared before someone was aware, they had us worried seriously that something bad might have happened. But in fact, the persons in question reached all the way to [Sō](#) and got mixed in the crowd there. Finally the two got into trouble and were caught. Then the identities of the two were disclosed and we received a personal letter from [Ruler Sō](#), the Ruler of [Sō](#).

Though [Ruler Sō](#) said with his kindness that he would escort the two to [En](#), they cordially declined his offer because they couldn’t trespass on his kindness. Then I went to meet the two from [En](#), and my face literally burned with shame at that time.’

“Well, they are a Ruler and a [Kirin](#). Even if they are tired heavily, they have neither risk of getting a disease nor risk of death. Do continue this training until they understand their positions completely.”

[Shukō](#) is amazed at [Seishō](#)’s sharp tongue.

“Do you still hold a grudge because of the issue at [Sō](#)?”

“Of course. Put yourself in my place. I was laughed by the princess who said it was excellent that [En](#) became peaceful.”

[Shukō](#) looks up at the moon thinking that it might certainly be unpleasant.

“Well, if we are strict with them only 100 years, they would not return to former loose life even after we stop training.”

[Shukō](#) sees the face of [Seishō](#) who says quite calmly.

“Will you do this for 100 years?”

“Our movements would not touch the very core of their hearts if we don’t go to such lengths.”

“But, the hardship of lower officials of the inner palace...”

“No problem”, [Itan](#) laughs.

“They are pleased. Because, the bribe that is offered from each department every day.”

[Shukō](#) and [Seishō](#) just look at each other.

“...The bribe? Do you connive at it?”

“Why, nothing gets serious. All departments seem to think their absence from each conference is a disgrace to each department. Overlook the rampancy of a small amount of money as the bribe asking to keep it in one’s mind.”

[Shukō](#) thinks deeply. Under [Chōsai](#)’s control all officials are brought together [Rikukan-fu](#). On six days each department—[Ten](#), [Chi](#), [Shun](#), [Ka](#), [Shū](#), [Tō](#)—holds each conference in turn, and heads of [Rikukan](#) and [Sankō](#) hold one on the seventh day, which takes a round on seven days. On the day when [Shunkan](#) holds the conference, [Shukō](#) also does not want the Ruler and the [Taiho](#) to be absent. The pending problem does not advance, besides he has a show and a pride against other departments.

“Indeed... greasing attendants’ palm, officials ask that attendants wake them up and send them out in the outer palace at any cost.”

“It is a problem if its huge pride gives a small amount of money which makes them absent from the conference of other departments, if not so, it’s quite an encouraging thing for the lower officials. First of all, if they have no sting in it, they may never take care of those idiots.”

“...I’m surprised you don’t hesitate to do anything to attain your purpose.”

“It’s not my fault but their fault, because they don’t attend even the morning conference if I do not go that far.”

“That being said”, [Shukō](#) mutters.

“But... they do not seem to keep obediently, I think.”

“That’s it”, [Seishō](#) puts his glass on the table.

“Knowing them, it’s natural that they will escape at all costs.”

“I strongly order the lower officials not to take their eyes off from them even one moment. I told them severely to stay outside of the door when they were ordered to leave the room.”

“The two have the option of running away by force. No matter how ordered, they couldn’t have a hand on the royal bodies.”

“I told them to keep strict watch on the Five Gates and not to let them out.”

“About the Royal Gate?”

“Of course. The numbers of gatekeepers were doubled. Especially, I ordered persons in the stable, keeping their eye on and the mounts at all times.”

“The point is [Tama](#) and [Tora](#)!? [Sūgu](#) will go to meet them out of their own will if they are called because they are intelligent.”

[Seishō](#) also agrees as [Shukō](#) points it out. To give two [sūgu](#) to the master and the man is like telling them to escape, but one of them was already kept since the Ruler [Kyō](#)’s era. The first [Tama](#) already died, but when officials were cut down, one of officials saved his own skin by presenting the second [Tama](#) and [Tora](#) to the Ruler, this act was ill-judged and uncontrollable.

“Don’t worry. I know that. I already moved [Tama](#) and [Tora](#) to [Shiba](#)’s stable.”

“But, [Taiho](#) has [Shirei](#).”

[Seishō](#) says, and [Itan](#) gets lost for words for a moment.

“Yeah... There’s nothing we can do about it. Because [Shirei](#) is neither captured nor caged.”

[Seishō](#) sees [Itan](#) in a glacial look. If [Shirei](#) will carry [Taiho](#) away, it is useless that they set up a reliable blocking escape system and surround him. Moreover, [Kirin](#) can do metamorphosis as a last resort.

“I requested of [Tōkan-fu](#) about it. Well, you know, at one rebellion the horn of [Taiho](#) had been sealed. A stone or something. —We can do something if we have it.”

[Seishō](#) looks quite dissatisfied.

“Do you think that [Taiho](#) would obediently wear it? You have a big hole in an

essential point.”

[Itan](#) gets lost for words again. “Well”, [Shukō](#) smiles wryly to soothe them.

“Well, I’ve told [Taiho](#) that it’s [Shujō](#)’s fault.”

“—What?”

“So, I told him that his inconvenience is because of [Shujō](#). Because of his nature, [Taiho](#) will desert [Shujō](#) even if he runs away by using [Shirei](#). Positively, [Shujō](#) doesn’t like it and will order [Shirei](#) not to escape. Because [Shujō](#)’s instruction is priority to [Shirei](#) unless [Taiho](#) is in danger.”

“Hmm...”

[Itan](#) groans and turns his gaze to [Seishō](#). [Seishō](#) stares at [Shukō](#) aghast.

“However, till when does such a makeshift prevail? If they feel up to it, they do everything they can do.”

“Well, right...”

“Anyway, we should work [Shujō](#) and [Taiho](#) as hard as possible, until they determine to run away seriously.”

“You’re... smart.”

[Shukō](#) laughs [Itan](#)’s amazed voice.

“No way. Serious and honest, that’s my only saving grace.”

‘Don’t tell a lie’, at this time, the two monologues are folded in [Itan](#) and [Seishō](#)’s minds.



“I... can’t stand this kind of life.”

When [Rokuta](#) mutters, [Shōryū](#) also nods silently. Now, [Shōryū](#)’s wide private room is uninhabited, but this is because he ordered to leave the room for the time being, otherwise, male and female attendants are thronging around them all the time. They are disgusted about that, besides many people he ordered to leave the room still stay outside the door and the window, so they can’t settle down.

“All is your fault, your going places here and there. I am perishing nuisance because of you.”

“About going places, you’re no different.”

The quality of going places is different. Though [Rokuta](#) wanted to object, same words have been exchanged many times, so repeating is also troublesome. He is already sleepy just after dinner, because he is gotten up early in the morning and he has to work on affairs of state and acquire culture etc without wasting a minute.

[Rokuta](#) sticks to a table.

“I need your help!”

“...I think I can do something.”

[Rokuta](#) jumps to his feet against [Shōryū](#)’s low voice.

“—[Shōryū](#).”

His voice by itself becomes higher with expectation and [Shōryū](#) calms down him by a hand.

“If you have a will to conclude the negotiation for peace.”

“The negotiation for peace?”

“Seeing these fellows’ ways, it is obvious their assumption is you and I don’t conspire with each other. They think we will drag down each other about this thing.”

“No wonder. I have a hard time with your by-blow.”

“I say that is fellows’ strategies. —Oh well. Anyway, if we collude with each other, I have something I can do.”

“...Do you or I become a decoy?”

“Should I say we pull the lower officials around by becoming a decoy for each other. While I play a decoy, you think about a plan which makes me escape. After a break, you become a decoy and I think about your plan.”

“Hmmm”, [Rokuta](#) murmurs. He thinks his cooperation with [Shōryū](#) might be effective, if those three take their thwarting each other into consideration. However, if [Shōryū](#) betrays him and he is held captive by ill chance, he would find himself performing an ungrateful task.

“If one of us fails at running away, he would get beaten up absolutely.”

“So we do conspire with each other.”

“It is doubtful you propose such a thing.”

“What do you say? You look wasted away, so I will help you, I say.”

[Rokuta](#) points his finger at [Shōryū](#).

“You, I cannot trust at all.”

“Do you doubt your master’s warm-heart?”

“More than trusting your warm-heart, it’s better expecting [Shukō](#) and the others suddenly tell me to go for fun and genuinely send me off.”

“In the first place”, [Rokuta](#) looks into [Shōryū](#)’s face.

“Why don’t you set me free by becoming a decoy if having a warm-heart? You don’t need to make yourself the decoy, if you had canceled your instruction for [Shirei](#), I could let myself off in now, couldn’t I?”

[Shōryū](#) frowns like being touched on the raw.

“...I am thinking to have a place to visit.”

“Oh, yeah?”

“I promised to come again at the same season. —Please, [Rokuta](#).”

‘A woman?’ He thinks so, but ‘please’ makes him feel better.

“What do I do? If we manage to escape, we might have very hard time when coming back.”

“When the very time comes, I’ll do something for you by my order.”

“Why don’t you do it, right now?”

[Shōryū](#) raises his eyebrows like having heard a very unexpected thing.

“They are thinking they confined us by this. We should get around them, shouldn’t we?”

[Rokuta](#) claps his hands after a split second.

“Yeah, right.”

“Using Imperial orders and [Shirei](#) are the height of folly, we run away from the front fairly if running away.”

“Is it fair to get around them?”

“No deal?”

[Rokuta](#) laughs satisfactorily.

“Deal.”

And [Rokuta](#) grabs a teaware, takes a stance lightly toward the floor and laughs at

[Shōryū](#) who have done suspiciously.

“To relax them, we should play a big fight now?”

The plain below is a dazzling golden color.

“—Awesome.”

On the 5th day since they had had the talk, [Rokuta](#) got shrewdly away from [Mt. Kankyū](#) after doing a magnificent day-long game of tag using [Gen'ei-kyū](#) as a background.

It is only revenge that the day was one of [Tenkan-fu](#)'s conference days. As he left [Tora](#)'s reins to his [Shirei](#) and ran all night, [Gen'ei-kyū](#) is the other side of the world, though [Itan](#) might be surely angry. He thinks such a thing is a trivial matter when seeing this spectacle in his presence, though he might have difficulties if returning.

When he gets over the mountainous district covered with heavy green, he reaches vast plains. [Tora](#) flies at high speed in the air, so [Rokuta](#) can see an expanse of farmland from [Tora](#)'s back. It is just before the harvest, as the rainy season will be soon, the farmland looks a very shiny golden color. The wind makes ripples of the golden sea's surface. You can see the blue ocean beyond lapping waves. On the borderline between the sea and the sky, it is a ridge-line of the [Kongō Mountains](#) which rises like very thin purple-blue illusion around the Yellow Sea.

Areas along the inland sea of [En](#) project like dividing into parts the Black Sea and the Blue Sea. The division of the Black Sea and the Blue Sea is the [Northeast Seagate](#), and this side is the State [Tei](#), the opposite bank is called the county [Gon](#) that is a detached territory of the State [Sei](#) where the capital exists.

“I like this sea better.”

[Rokuta](#) says to himself. He is alone in the air as far as he can see and resembles to [Gen'ei-kyū](#) that is left behind in the sea. [Rokuta](#) glances up. The clear blue sky's looking high and the water of the Sea of Clouds there can't be seen. If you rise up to the higher sky, you occasionally see the bottom of the Sea of Clouds like a board of crystal if looked at from different angles, but usually you cannot recognize the sea there. However, even if not seen by any eyes, the sea is there and separates the clouds from the lower world. —They are clearly separated.

“...Was [Shōryū](#) able to get out?”

With a laugh he recalls the commotion in [Gen'ei-kyū](#) and thinks [Shōryū](#) must have made it up because he knows [Shōryū](#). Well, he doesn't care about it. Because he is in the air of the lower world.

[Tora](#) goes over fields and mountains which are colored richly, and reaches the sea. The mountains ahead, is the [Kongō Mountains](#). Going across the sea, there is a land like a sandbar that projects to the foot of the [Kongō Mountains](#), [Gon](#). One of the Four Gates to enter the Yellow Sea is there, the [Great Gate of Northeast](#).

Passing through fields and mountains which cover a small extent of [Gon](#), [Rokuta](#) goes in deeply and lands on a town at [Gon](#) when the sun is going down. Though the county [Gon](#) is a detached territory of the State [Sei](#) that is [Rokuta](#)'s domain, nobody here might recognize his face. He goes to [Jinmon](#) on the southwest of the town, dismounting from [Tora](#) and pulling its reins calmly.

Beyond the building next to [Jinmon](#), you can see the surface of the [Kongō Mountains](#) as if it towers precipitously. Although it is not the closing time, [Jinmon](#) is already shut. Outside of [Jinmon](#), there is only the [Great Gate of Northeast](#). [Jinmon](#) opens only on the day of winter solstices because the [Great Gate of Northeast](#) opens only on that day. This winter solstice is still far away. So, [Gon](#)'s town in front of the gate is very quiet.

“You were born on the other side of the gate... Do you remember?”

They pause in the square in front of the gate and when he talks drawing [Tora](#)’s neck to his face, his [sūgu](#) barks as if saying yes.

“Do you want to return?”

Against [Rokuta](#)’s question, [Tora](#) only purrs as if wanting to say ‘I don’t know.’

[Rokuta](#) himself wants to go to the other side. Four years passed from changing the name of the era, and the 5th year will begin soon. —Yes, he really understands the meaning of jeopardizing his own life. He wants to go, but cannot. It’s even more difficult since he saw the burnt ground had been covered with the splendid golden sea.

He breathes deeply, pulling [Tora](#)’s reins he approaches to the building nearby the gate, and there stands a high bulletin board aside. This is the other side of [En](#) as a contact point between the Yellow Sea and [En](#). The board is exactly the same as it was when it was put up four years ago. It is enclosed by the wall and the roof like a long and slender hut and defended from wind and rain. A keeper stands idly next to the board.

[Rokuta](#) looks up the board. It is called ‘the edict of conveyance animals and poultry’ or ‘the edict of four rides and seven animals’. —It reads ‘add [Yōma](#) to conveyance animals and poultry’. When [Shōryū](#) put out this edict, [Itan](#), [Shukō](#), and [Seishō](#) were amazed. Only [Rokuta](#) knows the meaning.

The young keeper looks into [Rokuta](#)’s face because he looks hard at it.

“What’s your name?”



[Rokuta](#) looks up the keeper's face.

"My name? Why?"

"Ah — Well, O.K. You don't even look 15."

[Rokuta](#) nods. — [Rokuta](#) knows why he is asked his name. Because [Rokuta](#) himself has the power of a state marquis of the State [Sei](#) and ordered it.

"Are you looking for someone? A wanted person?"

The keeper waves to him as if saying no and [Rokuta](#) is slightly relieved. It is the same old story that a 'Missing person' becomes a 'Wanted person' before one is aware.

"There are great people looking for a person named [Kōya](#), around 15."

"Hmm."

The promise was accomplished. However, he is out of contact until now. They can know [Kōya](#) is still alive because his name doesn't disappear from [Senseki](#).

The keeper laughs.

"Do they owe thanks to him? — They told us to take him to the county castle respectfully when the person named [Kōya](#) shows up. If he refuses,"

[Rokuta](#) opens his eyes wide and sees the keeper's face. [Rokuta](#) doesn't order 'if', though he gave instructions to guide [Kōya](#) to the county castle and to report.

“they also ordered me to tell him there’s a grave in [Mt.Shō](#).”

“[Mt.Shō](#)? —A grave? Whose?”

The keeper looks doubtful.

“I was not given the details. —There is an imperial demesne named [Hekishō](#) close to the border with the State [Gen. Ryōunzan](#) existing in [Hekishō](#) is an imperial park, and its name is [Mt.Shō](#).”

“An imperial park...”

“In [Mt.Shō](#), might they have a connection with the Ruler —both the person in the grave and [Kōya](#).”

“...Another new building was completed.”

The man who is vacantly looking at the outside from the window rests his cheek on his hand and says so. Outside of the window is a boulevard of [Hekishō](#), a new big building has been built on the opposite side of the street. [Shōgyoku](#) sees and laughs at it.

“The amount of people have increased in [Hekishō](#). It is like a dream compared to my childhood.”

[Shōgyoku](#) shaves a [round brick tea](#). The famous tea of [Hakutan](#), which is from [Kei](#) located east of [En](#), is what the man brought last night. The tea should be pretty expensive, nevertheless, he threw it out and told her he wanted to have it. His [courtesy name](#) is [Fūkan](#), she doesn't know what his occupation is and where he comes from. He is probably not from a neighboring area because his visiting has an interval of about half year. He has a splendid conveyance animal and is generous with his money, so, he might be rich, but, when women asked him how he got such good tea, he answered he'd stolen it.

“...The more people, the more buildings for pleasure. How incorrigible human is!”

“An ordinary man, he doesn't turn a phrase. Shave this, if you are lying around. Maybe it's good tea, but it's too tough.”

The man nods to [Shōgyoku](#) and receives the round brick tea and the knife from her. He obediently shaves the brick, and begins to drop the sheavings into a [teaware](#) on his knee. [Shōgyoku](#) gazes out the window after laughing at his actions. Red roofing tiles and green pillars. Brand-new high buildings continue.

“Right, the population increased ...When I was a kid, this area was absolutely barren. When digging up the ground, we found out burnt rubble and white bones. At the imperial demesne? Can you believe it?”

The man laughed.

“They say [En](#) was ruined once. —Is this enough?”

He passes the [teaware](#) to [Shōgyoku](#), and she opens her mouth a little.

“Who drinks so much? The shaved tea loses taste.”

“You make me work, and scold me?”

He says so, and [Shōgyoku](#) glares at him.

“You are in my debt. You forgot, didn’t you?”

He checked in around the closing time of the gate, called in about ten geishas and gave a big feast, besides, placed foolish bets all night and lost a lot of money. Though he took a room for an overnight stay, [Shōgyoku](#) won it from him because of a bet, he was very depressed, so, [Shōgyoku](#) lent him her private room.

“If you make this tea, I will wipe all your debts away.”

Hearing her, he gets off his butt grumbling. [Shōgyoku](#) laughs and watches over how he makes tea so unskillfully.

“What do you do for a living?”

“Well.”

“What are you, an official?”

“I look like an official?”

“No. But, you come to [Mt.Shō](#) to climb every time, don’t you? Your job, isn’t it? That is a forgotten and spooky place, although an imperial park.”

“It’s not my job. It’s kind of a pleasure jaunt.”

“No kidding! There’s nothing worth seeing.”

The man laughs thinly.

“A grave there.”

[Shōgyoku](#) blinks.

“...I’ve heard about it. In [Mt.Shō](#), there’s [Gen-paku](#)’s grave. A prime minister long ago was put on public display, wasn’t he?”

“Public display?”

“Yeah, I heard. He raised a high treason. So, they displayed his body in public.”

“It’s nonsense.” laughs the man.

“It’s not a display but just a grave. First of all, it makes no sense to display a rebel

in an out-of-sight place.”

“Oh... You’re right. But, it’s the grave of [Gen-paku](#), isn’t it? Since you visit his grave, are you connected to [Gen-paku](#), [Fūkan](#)?”

“I don’t have necessarily no relation with him.”

“Well, you are a bad guy, too. Because, the [Gen-paku](#) was truly a bad guy, wasn’t he?”

He laughs.

“I don’t care if you said anything, but that would put [Atsuyu](#) in an awkward position.”

“[Atsuyu](#)—[Gen-paku](#)? But, it’s so in the story. He killed [Gen-kō](#), made the State [Gen](#) with his own way, and caused the rebellion at last.”

“Indeed, that’s how it has been widely known.”

Holding his tea cup, he is back by the window. He indifferently looks down at the road.

“...[Atsuyu](#) was a son of [Gen-kō](#). In Ruler [Kyō](#)’s era he became a [Reiin](#) and helped his father, but, his father was really coward. Ruler [Kyō](#) was the same kind of disaster as wars and acts of nature. His father was not a person who can get over the disaster. [Atsuyu](#) expelled his father, and acted as [Gen](#)’s leader. Though [Atsuyu](#) deprived the state marquis of his place, he can be said to have removed the disaster, if we think about it, his father assisted to Ruler [Kyō](#) and oppressed the people.”

“You talk as if you had seen it. —But, a crime is a crime, isn’t it?”

“Yes, you’re right. —But here’s another man who had the same coward father. A disaster was approaching. His father also was not a person who can get over the disaster, and he knew it. He kept himself without committing the crime to his father, but his family territory was ruined by the disaster.”

He smiles slightly wryly. He himself looks ridiculed.

“After killing his father, [Atsuyu](#) got over the disaster and saved the people. Another man didn’t kill his father because he’s afraid of being a criminal, and left the people to die. Which was better?”

“...I think it’s not [Atsuyu](#). After all, he made the high treason because he’s a person who didn’t fear the crime, did he?”

“You think so...?”

The man peers into his tea cup.

“I don’t know [Atsuyu](#) well... I think [Atsuyu](#) decided that he had no worth if he was not a lord. He decided he had to be a good lord. He caused the rebellion, but, I think he didn’t want the throne. Ruler [Kyō](#) appointed his father as [Gen-kō](#), and he himself was just [Gen-kō](#)’s [Reiin](#). If someone had ascended the throne as the new Ruler, it would have been impossible for him to keep his position, so, he had tried to be number one.”

“...I don’t know.”

“Me, neither. But I think [Atsuyu](#) wanted to be a good load. Yeah, he wanted praise. And, he had no inconsistency. —Should I say that he had no hesitation

for his wish? Therefore, he did not fear to be a criminal.”

“In short, he wanted praise by everyone?”

The man looks back at [Shōgyoku](#)’s question.

“Was he wrong? [Atsuyu](#) wanted a good name. That’s not bad. He gave the people beneficence for the good name. Whatever the fact is, the people are enriched, and the monarch is also enriched if the people praise him as a splendid monarch.”

“That’s true, but...”

“Sometimes, I dream that he was able to carry out the good name to the last minute. As a matter of fact, [Atsuyu](#) had to defend himself as the lord before he got the good name, but, if he pursued only the good name to the last minute, he might have been the finest man as a Ruler.”

[Shōgyoku](#) has her eyes wide open.

“You’re kidding.”

“Oh?”

“There was already a Ruler in the throne, so his act was the high treason! He didn’t carry out his original intention, so, he didn’t have a talent enough as a Ruler, I think. Or, [Atsuyu](#) lacked something. If not, the [Taiho](#) would have elected [Atsuyu](#) for a Ruler.”

“Ah”, the man laughed.



“I get it...”

[Mt.Shō](#) is a desolate mountain. The rocks are clung to by dried-up moss lying over one another, they are friable, and slide down easily when putting your foot on them. You are not likely to be able to climb it if you have no flying mount.

“If it’s raining, I can’t climb it in spite of [Tora](#).”

[Rokuta](#) looks up at the rocks unstably piled, and mutters to himself. It’s windy. Every time it gusts, there’s a clatter of stones falling. If it rains a lot, it might not survive against it. There is little doubt that this mountain collapses in every rainy season.

He can see the tiled roof of a small temple whose shape is barely kept on the high area of [Mt.Shō](#)’s main peak. Usually, [Ryōunzan](#) has a tunnel to go from the base to the temple, but he cannot find its entrance which might have been buried. He reluctantly climbs depending on [Tora](#).

He goes up to the temple while avoiding gusts of wind and falling stones, and finds out it is in very miserable condition. Its pillars incline, and tiles fell away from the distorted roof. The name ‘[Mt.Shō](#)’ doesn’t sound familiar to [Rokuta](#) though he doesn’t know about all imperial demesnes, it is no doubt it’s a forgotten place. It has no particular products, and it is not used for anything. It might have been originally a mountain of graves.

The garden surrounding the temple is miserable, too. The rocks which dropped and sharply jumped lie around here and there. There is a small arbor in pinewoods that just keep up appearances, this still stands straight because it is being supported by the branches and roots of pines.

[Rokuta](#) gets out of the saddle, makes [Tora](#) wait around there, and goes into the

pinewoods. He laughs lightly because he finds out [Tama](#) lying down near the arbor.

“—Hey!”

[Rokuta](#) pats the [sūgu](#) that purrs, and peeks into the arbor. Nobody there, but [Rokuta](#) finds him who is sitting on the entrance steps and keeping a small jar while drinking.

“Booze up alone?”

When [Rokuta](#) calls to [Shōryū](#), he turns around. He is not very surprised, raises his easygoing hand and says “What’s up?”

“[Rokuta](#), why are you here?”

“Why! I should ask you that. It’s you who ordered a strange message to the keeper of the high bulletin board.”

He comes closer to its door and sits down next to [Shōryū](#). The stone pavement distorted and cracked in front of the arbor remains. Couches and tables carved from stone are still in an area as wide as a courtyard, but, thick grass of autumn grows in the stone pavement joints and cracks, and it makes it seem ruined.

“Drinking here makes you happy?”

[Shōryū](#) laughs.

“At least, I can’t hear [Shukō](#) and [Itan](#)’s growls.”

“Oh I see.”

Beyond the stone pavement, he can see a mound nearby the base of the pine. They plant a catalpa on a mound and substitute it for a burial marker, but this mound has a stone on its head and the stone is wet as watered just now.

“—Is that [Atsuyu](#)’s?”

“Uh-huh.”

“That was just before the rainy season. Like now —well, a little later.”

Watching the mound, [Rokuta](#) mutters and chases his memory for a little while. The detail has already lost substance. This memory might be lost in each rainy season as this mountain collapses in each rainy season. Sooner or later, even if he tries it will become impossible to recall.

“Now, I see. You said you had a promise, so I surely thought it was a juicy one. You cannot climb this mountain after entering the rainy season, though to say that was just this period is a bit earlier. So, you needed to escape from the palace before raining.”

[Rokuta](#) looks up at him as if ridiculing a little, but he shows neither reaction nor significance.

“What are you saying?”

[Rokuta](#) is laughing and looks back at the mound.

“I didn’t know you were so friendly to [Atsuyu](#) as to make his grave.”

“We may as well do that. Because [Atsuyu](#) left good officials for us.”

[Rokuta](#) nods his head. In fact, the officials of the State [Gen](#) had high ambitions and were able. Nobody was able to know the flag [Atsuyu](#) showed was true or false, but officials who gathered yearning for him did not have a lie. Afterward, when the Imperial court was renewed, they were as useful as could be.

“—However, if I do give him a decent burial, [Atsuyu](#) must be turning in his grave.”

“You know that, but, you boozing up face to face with him? It’s almost annoying.”

“Well, [Atsuyu](#) needs someone to complain to, for once.”

“He may visit you as a ghost someday.”

“Already.”

[Shōryū](#) says easily, and [Rokuta](#) takes a step back a little.

“Oh, kidding...”

“This area seems to have been a mausoleum in old times. So, it gathers not only [Atsuyu](#) but the dead in swarms.”

“In swarms.”

“Old and new. Those dead who gather want to say some complaints to me.”

“So,” [Shōryū](#) laughs.

“You’d better go down before sunset.”

[Rokuta](#) looks at his smile for a moment and nods.

“...Yeah, I do. I don’t like whinings and complaints.”

“Well, later.”

“Later,” [Rokuta](#) raises his hands, stands up, and walks back of the arbor. Patting [Tama](#)’s head once, he comes back to [Tora](#). Though [Tora](#) wonderingly compares the arbor with [Rokuta](#), he doesn’t care for it and takes the reins. He pats the [sūgu](#)’s neck.

“...[Shōryū](#) wants to be left alone, I realize. Leave him alone.”

“Haven’t you found them yet!?”

[Seishō](#) blows out his cheeks to [Itan](#)’s growl.

“Not at all, you know where they went?”

“They have their [sūgu](#) for riding. We also know their having gone out of [Kankyū](#) and toward the west. Despite this, you cannot even know their destinations! Why?”

“That is the only clue we have. Then, what do you want from me?”

“In the first place, why didn’t you chase after them immediately?”

“They rode on their [sūgu](#). We couldn’t catch them up, even if chasing after immediately.”

“Two [sūgu](#) had been placed in the [Kakan](#)’s stable. Tell me why those guys were able to run away with them.”

“The gate keeper of [Tenkan](#) is stupid, uh-huh?”

[Shukō](#) gets a tea set from an officer and put it between them who grimace.

“Stop it, you two are very childish. For what is your fight useful?”

[Itan](#) turns his fire on [Shukō](#).

“Why are you so calm?”

[Seishō](#) also nods in agreement and looks at [Shukō](#) who calmly faces a towering pile of documents in his own room of the office.

“I quite agree.”

“I’m not ok with it. —We already knew where it’s going to lead, don’t we? It’s hardly possible they behave well if confined. If they are told not to go, they do go at any cost. Have you two already thought about it?”

[Itan](#) strikes on the table.

“Right. —And if they are told to go, they really go out in their own way! How could I confine them permanently!?”

“So,” laughs [Shukō](#).

“Basically, there’s nothing way we can handle them.”

[Itan](#) has his head in his hands, and [Seishō](#) suppresses his temple. [Shukō](#) laughs.

“For the time being, I’m sure they understand that when they come they will not be able to get up late if they behave too crazy. Besides, they were patient during two months, so, we were able to settle a very great deal of duties. We should be satisfied with that.”

[Itan](#) reproachfully glares at the profile of [Shukō](#)’s straight face.

“In short, you gave it up from the start?”



“No,” [Shukō](#) looks feeling quite unhappy.

“I refuse [Shujō](#) and [Taiho](#) acting on their own. Therefore, I cooperated in you two.”

“You...”

“I have just said it is impossible to confine them. To hope that they are well-behaved Ruler and [Saiho](#) is wasting our time. For the time being, I’m satisfied that they have understood that they will get an annoying situation if crazily having their way. We should train and train them as not to cut loose too much.”

[Seishō](#) groans.

“Are they [Tama](#) and [Tora](#) level?”

“It might be impolite to the [sūgu](#). Say domestic animals level.”

[Itan](#) draws a long sigh.

“Hey... You abuse them very severely.”

“Well, did I say something wrong?”

“No,” [Itan](#) mutters in his mouth. They not only miss an imperial conference, but also conceal themselves in a moment. If you turn your head away from them, they even enter other countries and do something bad. Nevertheless, they suddenly show up the outside of the outer palace, and they do an awful instruction to officials. Every time they do, officials run about in confusion, it’s indeed extraordinary labor for officials.

—Certainly, they might be like domestic animals with a bad discipline.

“They will come back sooner or later. They have no other place to come back.”

“You bet?”

[Shukō](#) questioningly raises his eyes from the document when [Itan](#) says in disgust.

“Do you have any place to return except [Gen’ei-kyū](#)?”

“Huh?” [Shukō](#) laughs at [Itan](#) who has blinked.

“I envy you. I’m much younger than you, but I have no other place but here. You are a smart fellow.”

“No, it’s”

[Shukō](#) looks out through the window, laughing at [Itan](#) who is at a loss for words. The sea of the clouds as far as he can see, where he cannot see even a small island.

“This palace, it is like a ship that floats far off in the ocean. There is no shore where he reaches, even if disliking and rushing out from it.”

It is [Seishō](#) to mutter, “Maybe, you’re right.”

“There are no acquaintances and no town where I was born any longer. They would leave before several decades even if I made new acquaintances and places in the lower world.”

Though he has to resign from [Senseki](#) for disembarking, Ruler and [Kirin](#) cannot be allowed even to leave their positions. Besides, both of them are [Taika](#).

“—I see. This is the drift where people having no place to go gather.”

“I think this system is very well made. We have no other places for us. We have nothing to do except sailing this ship...”

“We do not have the land to go to though.”

When [Itan](#) crosses his arms, [Shukō](#) returns his eyes to the document.

“Where to reach or not won’t be a point. To begin with, we have no place that we should reach to. And we just go ahead today like yesterday, tomorrow like today.”

“Certainly...”

“Well, we only need to do it until the ship sinks.”

“When the end comes? When their ship sinks, it seems to be fast.”

[Itan](#) says and [Seishō](#) nods deeply.

“We might have to say that it survives still now. It seems to me all officials are suppressing holes so that water does not leak, because many holes are open here and there.”

“Definitely,” [Itan](#) smiles wryly.

“But, sometimes, such a ship keeps floating forever.”

“It keeps, doesn’t it...?”

“I don’t think so.”

“I don’t know.”

They have a look at the Sea of Clouds by each having his own way of questioning, but there are neither an island shadow nor bird shadows. The sea of the clouds is filled with complex colors because it projects the color of the lower world, and tireless waves wash the shore.